

ROMANCE OF THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT

TOLD BY THE AGED MAN WHO SET EVERY STONE IN THE SHAFT'S NEWER PORTION

Entertaining Reminiscences Regarding the Gradual Growth of the Pile---Row Over the Pope's Stone---Story of a Daring Climb Up a Rotten Rope---The Cat Yarn Is Vouched for---Monument Really Sways Out of Plumb Under the Sun's Influence.

MUCH has been written and published about the Washington Monument---always an object of wonder and admiration to the visitor and tourist. Verse has been indited to it and the kodak fiend has spared it not. But now for the first time is told in his own words, by the aged man who set every stone in the newer portion of the shaft, the romance of its building.

Thomas S. Purcell, now in his eighty-first year, and a resident of this city, is the man who finished the Washington Monument. He is probably one of the most experienced stonemasons that this country ever has known. He still takes an active interest in masonry of all kinds, and keeps informed of the progress of the great works of the day. He came originally to this city from Limerick, Ireland, in 1853, five years after the cornerstone of the Washington Monument was laid, to work as a stonemason on the extension of the Capitol. After that work was completed, he set the stone in the Patent Office building and in the original Postoffice Department building. Incidentally, he did the stone setting of most of the pedestals of the equestrian and other statues in this city. The last work that he did with his own hands was the setting of the stones of the new Naval Observatory. Here is his own story of the Monument:

By THOMAS S. PURCELL.

Who personally set every stone in the newer part of the Washington Monument.

"O H, yes, I can tell you the romance of the Washington Monument, but it is a long story and will take some time."

"I set every stone on it, from the second beginning of the work, when the shaft was 156 feet high, to the time the aluminum top was placed on it in 1885, which completed the job. I want to say at the start, and in doing so will use the words of Col. Thomas Lincoln Casey, afterward brigadier general of the corps of engineers of the army, who was in charge of the work, that the Washington Monument is the grandest column ever erected in any age of the world."

"Of course, as most everybody knows, it is the highest stone structure in existence, the Eiffel and other famous towers in Europe being but iron-work frames, though the Eiffel Tower is nearly double the height of the Washington Monument."

"The original idea of the Washington Monument began to work out the day after the remains of General Washington were placed in the tomb at Mt. Vernon, December 19, 1792. It came in the resolution of Henry Lee, who coined the phrase which will live forever, that Washington was 'first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen,' which asked Mrs. Washington's consent that the remains should be taken from Mt. Vernon and deposited under the Monument. Mrs. Washington gave the necessary consent, but after her death the members of the family objected."

Private Subscription Plan.

"I know the Monument from the day the cornerstone was laid in 1792, though I never saw it until five years afterward, when I came here to do some stone setting on the Capitol. I have lived here ever since, and have been in touch with it all the time. When the plan was originally put into operation, the members of the Monument Association supposed that it could be built by private subscription, and though they worked hard and persistently, they succeeded in getting only about \$55,000 subscribed. The subscriptions were limited to \$1 each as a rule, but there were a few that were larger."

"The work ran along very well until 1856, when political troubles ended it all through the destruction of what was known as the Pope's stone. The Monument Association requested all national, city, and foreign governments to contribute a stone for the work, and the request was very generally responded to. These stones, hundreds in number, are now to be seen on the inside of the obelisk. They came from churches, organizations, and governments. In the course of time, a stone came from the Papal government of Rome. I remember the stone very well, and have a piece of it now. It was of variegated marble, and about as large as an ordinary trunk. The stone remained there for nearly a year and no one thought there was much harm in it."

"Harm or no harm, it was a gift and it was hardly fair to treat it as such. Finally, in 1856, an organization known as the 'Know-Nothings,'

conceived that it was a dangerous thing to put in the Monument and some of its members secretly arranged a plan for its destruction."

"In the spring of 1855, a party of 'Know-Nothings' went over to the Monument and took possession of the stone. There were plenty of stories there from foreign governments, but the thought of having a stone from the Pope of Rome was too much for them. Had it come from the Italian government, pure and simple, it would have escaped destruction, but coming from the Papal government it was too much. Probably had the Catholics of this city known that there was to have been a raid on the stone they would have protected it at any cost, as they protected their churches, convents, colleges, and seminaries from similar raids."

Destruction of "Papal Stone."

"The first thing they knew about it was when they woke up one morning and found that the Papal stone had been destroyed. It appeared that the raiders seized and tied the watchman, and finding that the stone was too large and heavy for them to lift, they broke it up into hundreds of pieces, and then took the large pieces and threw them into the Potomac at some place that never yet has been discovered."

ered. I got some of the pieces the next morning, as did many others. "The affair raised about as much sensation at that time, in a local way, as did the firing on Fort Sumter some years after, or the destruction of the Maine in more recent years, for it was thought there would be a religious war started by it. Happily, however, that was averted."

"The boys had a song about it at this time, with words like this:

"The Pope of Rome, he sent a stone To the Washington Monument according, But the Know-Nothings boys they took the stone And threw it to the other side of Jordan."

"Of course, in a few years, the excitement cooled down, for just about then the people began to talk about what turned out to be our civil war. But the end of the Monument seemed to be in sight."

"Things ran along in that shape until about 1870, when the Monument Association began agitating the subject of the completion of the work, and finally got Congress, in 1876, to appropriate a year, when patriotism was about the only thing thought of, to take the job off their hands."

"Well, Congress having furnished money, the next thing was to commence the work. It was soon definitely ascertained that the foundation of the Monument was hardly sufficient for the enormous weight of the structure, and plans were prepared for strengthening it. But this was not as much of a job as it looked to be. I find that it is very generally believed now that the entire foundation of the Monument was taken out and an entirely new one put in. This is an error. There was an addition, eight feet in width, put on the north and south sides, which gave the new foundation."

considerably less formal than that at the laying of the first one, but it was formal enough. This corner stone was the first one I set, and is in the north-east corner of the wall. We put the usual lot of coins and mementos under it."

Setting the Stone.

"But perhaps I am ahead of my story. We did a great deal of work before we began to set the stone. First, we had to get the marble and have it cut. The upper portion of the Monument, as can be readily seen, is of different marble from the lower. The first is what is called an alumn marble. The stone in the upper part is a marble quarried at Cockeysville, Md. It is the same as that from which the monolithic columns at the Capitol were cut, and is equally as good as that in the lower part. It also takes a higher polish."

"As we went along with the work, plummets were hung with steel wires from the top, at each of the corners. These rested in tanks of molasses, and tests were made frequently, often every day. There was a theory that what was known as the Babcock lake, which was 150 yards northwest of the Monument, in some way had weakened the foundation, and though I never took much stock in the theory, the lake was finally filled up. It was probably the safest thing to do, but there was no actual necessity for it."

"There was a second corner stone laid, marking the renewal of the work, on August 7, 1880. The ceremony was

ready to set, the next thing was to get to the top of the work. There were all kinds of plans proposed to get to the top of the structure which had been left for so many years, thirty-three in fact, in an unprotected condition, carrying a rough board roof, which had rotted almost completely away, and what was left of it likely to blow off in any kind of a storm. One of the plans was to shoot a cannon ball with a rope attached over the monument, and thus establish communication with the top."

"I find that it is very generally believed that we did the work in that way, and I have seen in the past twenty years a full description of how it was done with the aid of a cannon ball. But there is nothing but imagination in the story, though it read very well."

"The truth is that the top was reached in a very different and much less sensational way. We found hanging on the inside of the Monument a

large rope which had hung there since the work had been deserted in 1826. This rope was originally in a block, but the block had rusted and would not work. An old friend of mine, Michael Crowley, a rigger who was at work at the Navy Yard, examined the rope and satisfied himself that he could climb it hand over hand to the top. After convincing Colonel Casey, who was in charge of the work, that he could do so, he started on his perilous task. We prayed for him and his success, which was all that we could do and our prayers and his undaunted courage and skill did the rest."

"He took up with him a ball of twine, and, on arriving on top, let it down. To that we tied a somewhat heavier cord, and with that he pulled up a rope. Then he pulled up a block, and the necessary fixings to make it fast. That afternoon he came down in all the glory of a triumphant king in a rigger's chair, loving himself. "The rigging being established once,

it was made strong, and scores of men were from time to time sent to the top, I being one of the first to go up, as the setting of the stone on the job was placed entirely in my charge. The steps on the inside and the freight elevator followed as rapidly as we could build them. After we got to think it over, we began to realize what a marvelous task that Crowley had performed. I know of nothing similar to it. The rope that he climbed had, as I have said, hung there for over a quarter of a century, and though it looked strong enough, it was about one-and-a-half inches in thickness--we afterward saw that it was thoroughly rotten for when he cut it loose and let it drop to the ground, it went into powder. Indeed, I do not think there was a piece of it five feet long after it reached the ground."

"On studying the work, I found that the uncovered condition of things up there had so affected the upper courses of the stone that I concluded we should leave off there of them. This was approved of, and we went to work in that direction in June of July, so that we had things in shape for the resumption of the building of the monument on the date indicated in August."

"Visitors to the Monument notice that the stones on the lower part are spalled or chipped off at the joints and edges. This is the result of the heavy weight. Each of the courses of the old work was set on a strip of lead. As time passed this strip rotted away by the action of the air, making the joints look as if they had been set in red lead. This red appearance is the red oxide of the lead, or red lead, as it is generally called. In the new work, the strip of lead was done away with, though there were pieces of lead, say, two inches square and a quarter of an inch thick, placed under each of the corners of the outside face stones, before the bed of cement was laid for them."

"There is no spalling or chipping, all in the joints in the upper part of the work yet and probably will not be."

Vouches for Cat Story.

"About the story of the cat jumping off the top of the monument? Yes, the story is true in every particular. One morning, when we were about 420 feet high, the men on going up on the work saw the cat. It had been seen there before and evidently went up by the steps to pick up the leavings of the men's lunches. The cat probably imagined that harm was going to be done if, for all it jumped into the air."

"Some of the men say it turned over two or three times while in the air, but surely it is that the cat landed on its feet and ran off as if it were not badly damaged by its terrible leap and very sudden stopping. It was the record for a cat jump."

"The cat ran towards the fish ponds, when a terrier belonging to Mr. Shea, the watchman ran after it and killed it. I am told the skeleton of the cat is in the Army Medical Museum, though I have never investigated the matter. Certain it is, however, that the cat took the jump, terrible as it was, and landed alive and apparently in good condition."

"There has been no end of contention among baseball fans, as well as others, as to whether it is possible for a ball player or anyone else on the ground to catch a ball thrown from the top of the Monument. My own idea is that it cannot be done. I have seen the figures time and time again, but the formula has escaped my mind. The looks tell exactly how much a ball would weigh, its velocity, and the force it would exert if thrown from a 500-foot height. I think they all agree that by the time it landed in the catcher's hands it would be use a slang phrase, be 'hot stuff,' if not decidedly red hot. Still others can answer that question. I do not know of its ever having been tried."

"I also do not take much stock in the theory that the Monument leans to the east to get a kiss from the rising sun every morning, and then after the day has passed leans over to the west to say a sweet goodnight to the sinking sun. There is no doubt in the world that contraction and expansion play a part on all high structures, marble or iron, but I do not think the Monument leans over so much as many have claimed and as many now claim. It is so heavy that by the time the sun is getting in its early morning work the day is half passed, and before it can resume its perpetual kiss to get ready for the good night kiss, the rest of the sunlit day has gone."

Sun Sways the Shaft.

"Still, there was a record kept every day while we were on the work and a careful scientific one too, and it showed that the Monument under the influence of the sun sways out of plumb, but only for a fraction of an inch, not a foot or feet as some think or have been told. I think the Goddess of Liberty on the top of the Capitol wonders around in the kissing business more than the aluminum capstone on the monument, for the reason that the fair and pretty Goddess stands on a foundation of iron which rests on a dome made entirely of iron. Still, the Monument moves, heavy as it is."

"One of the most remarkable things during the whole work, barring the cat incident, was the fact that no accident or serious mishap occurred. No one was injured in any way, and after the men got used to working at the great height, they seemed as confident and as safe as if they were working on the ground."

"There was a rope net hung on the outside of the four walls, which guaranteed the safety of all hands. "The ceremonies in connection with the dedication which occurred on Saturday, February 21, 1885, were particularly interesting. It was desired that they should take place on Washington's Birthday, February 22, but the day falling on Sunday, they were anticipated on Sunday."

"Robert C. Winthrop, of Massachusetts, who was the orator at the laying of the foundation, in 1816, when he was Speaker of the House of Representatives, though very advanced in years, was appropriately selected as the orator at the dedication, and, though he had prepared his oration, a masterly effort, he was unable to be present. It was, therefore, read by Governor Long, of Massachusetts, who was then a member of the House of Representatives."

